

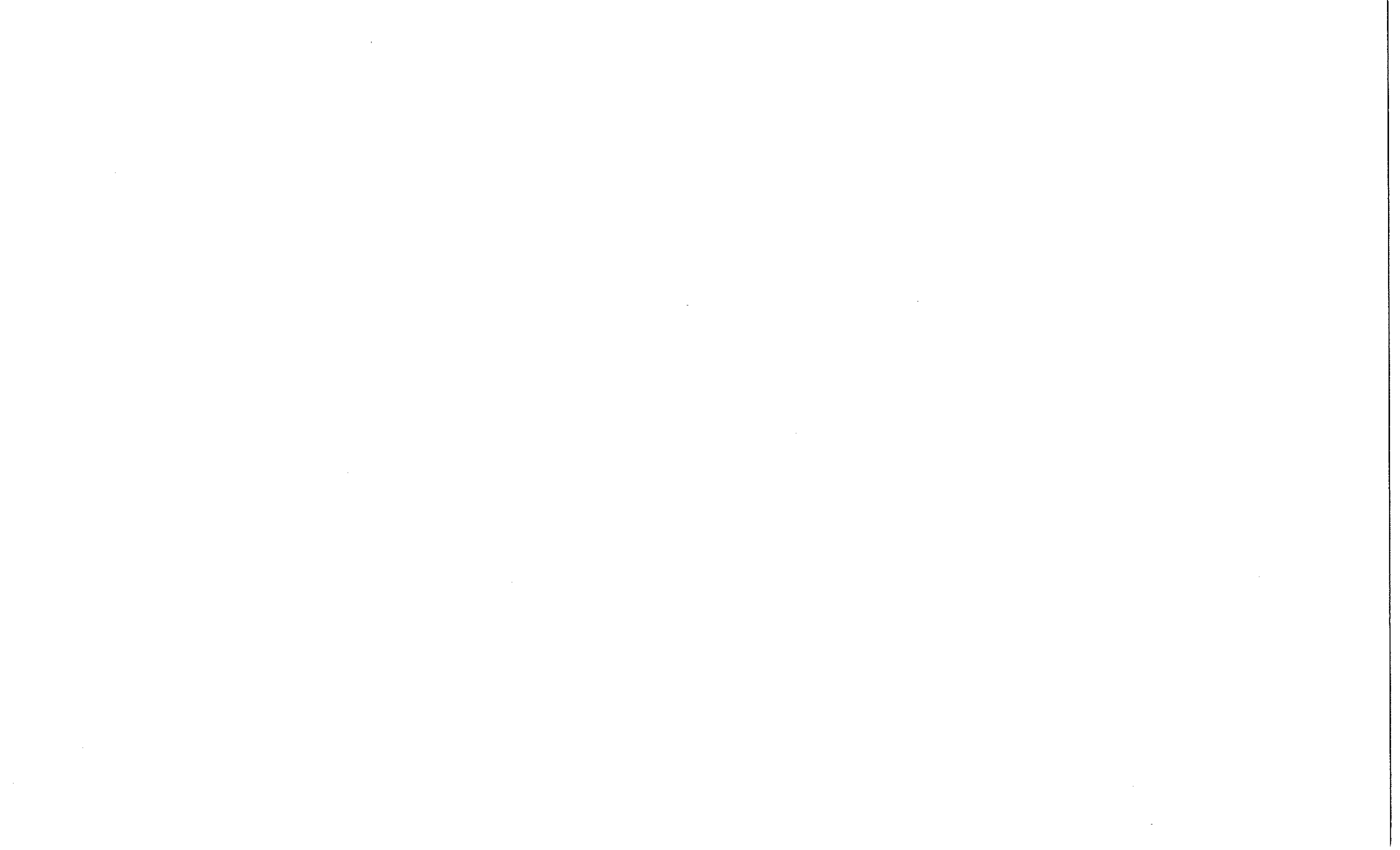
THE UNITED CHURCH

HISTORY
of
THE UNITED CHURCH
OF NEW HAVEN

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CHAPTER IX

THE TEMPERANCE QUESTION AND SLAVERY

Two other great movements in which the church was interested, temperance and slavery, were also manifestations of the reforming and humanitarian spirit of the times. Though after 1818 the church and its officers could no longer be under even the suspicion of belonging to a political group, as the Standing Order had been, yet its actions and the weight and influence of its leaders made clear its stand on these questions.

The church was obliged to consider the temperance question in its own organization, because of its interpretation of the duty to have "watch and care" over members. This obligation was interpreted literally and taken seriously. Trials for intemperance occurred during the 18th century, but over a considerable period in the early 19th century a larger share of the time of the business meetings of the church was devoted to the consideration of cases of members accused of the "improper use of ardent spirits." It was necessary to hold many extra meetings and to appoint many special committees to deal with this subject. Women as well as men were guilty of the fault, and were brought to trial. The condition was not peculiar to this church, and roused churches and ministers everywhere to the dangers of intemperance.

In 1825 Lyman Beecher delivered his famous six sermons on temperance, and on Fast Day of the same year Mr. Merwin preached a sermon on the subject. Not long afterwards a temperance society was formed in New Haven. Many meetings considered the advisability of forming such a society in the church but the problem was a difficult one. Some men who had become members in good faith sold liquor in connection with groceries and other goods, and felt they had a right to continue the trade. This point of view is set forth in a letter written by a member to the minister. The writer said that he sold liquor as well as drugs and medicines and that in doing so he tried to discriminate between those who needed it and those who did not. However, he continued, he saw no scriptural basis for a rule against its sale, and he

considered it a civil and lawful pursuit. The church, he felt, could not regulate the occupations of its members, and if it tried to do so, it was making an arbitrary assumption of power. He believed in temperance, he said, but through reason and persuasion, not by penal enactment.

Many meetings discussed the subject, only to adjourn without having decided on a policy other than disapproval, the adoption of moral suasion, and the discipline of erring members. In 1832 the church advanced to the point of passing almost unanimously the following resolution: "Whereas the Temperance reform has become intimately identified with the interests of religion, being as it evidently is, a powerful auxiliary in the great work of converting men to Christ; and whereas, the immense evils resulting to the *chh* from the desolating scourge of intemperance can never be prevented but by a cordial and universal effort of the friends of religion,—Therefore *Resolved*—that in the opinion of this Church the use and traffic in ardent Spirits for other than medicinal purposes; ought *to be abandoned by every Christian Professor.*" Two years later a resolution was offered which went further—"that in all future applications for admission into this church it be required of the applicants that they give their pledge to abstain from the use and traffic of ardent spirits as a drink as one condition of membership." But the people were not ready for such action or to vote that use and traffic in ardent spirits was a cause of discipline.

An important case was that of two brothers who were brought before the church for selling liquor. The case dragged on for some time, the brothers claiming in a letter to the church that when they joined it in 1821, at the earnest solicitation of the pastor and a great number of the brethren, there was no question of the legality or morality of their business, and bringing the charge of slander against one of the brothers who had brought the complaint against them. At several meetings of the church they argued from the Scriptures in defence of their business. During the course of the discussions, simultaneous notices appeared in the New Haven newspapers advertising both their business of selling liquor and the sale of their seat in the gallery of Mr. Merwin's church. The church did not pass sentence upon them, but withdrew its watch and care in 1837, when they had ceased attendance at its services. Meanwhile it voted that use and traffic in ardent

spirits were immoralities, and later other persons were excommunicated for selling liquors, the church thereby taking a stand of the question. Growth of sentiment among the members on this subject is shown by the action of Timothy Bishop, who joined the church in 1817 and was an active worker. A business man in the West India trade, whose chief staple was rum, he gave it up for moral reasons.

Another question which agitated the church from time to time as it did the whole country was slavery and the problem of the negro. Out of it developed some of the most famous events in the history of the North Church. The first was the delivery of a sermon by Jonathan Edwards, Jr., on the evils of the slave trade. It was not preached to this church, to be sure, but delivered by its minister and published as a pamphlet. Both Edwards and members of his church and society held offices in local and national societies formed against that institution and to improve the lot of the slave.

In 1831 and the years following, a member of the Third Church, Simeon Jocelyn, was prominent in all works for the help of negroes. He supported among other things the effort to found a negro college in New Haven, which should also be a center for movements in their behalf. Jocelyn allowed his name to be used by Miss Prudence Crandall of Canterbury as approving her plan of changing her private school for girls into one for the education of "Young Ladies and Little Misses of Color." He was minister of the first church in New Haven organized for colored people. He and his brother, Deacon Nathaniel Jocelyn of the North Church, established a tradition in the family of working for the colored race which was continued by Nathaniel's grandson, Judge Livingston W. Cleaveland.

The Jocelyns and other members of the church, Roger Sherman Baldwin and Arthur Tappan, were closely connected with one of the most famous incidents in the history of slavery agitation, the trial, in 1839-1840, of the Amistad captives. These unfortunate negroes had been seized in Africa as slaves and were being taken from Havana to Cuba on a Spanish ship, the Amistad. During the voyage they mutinied and succeeded in getting control of the ship, after killing the captain and some of the crew, permitting others to escape in the small boat. They ordered the remaining whites to pilot the ship to Africa, but as the negroes knew nothing

of navigation, the whites were able to deceive them as to the course and change the direction at night from east to northwest. After about two months, the negroes landed on the shore of Long Island to obtain water and supplies, where they were captured and arrested by government officials. They were ultimately deposited in the New Haven jail while the case involving them was brought to trial.

The negroes understood and spoke no language but their own, but through the efforts of Professor Gibbs a means of communication was finally established. The men who claimed ownership of them as slaves brought suit for their return. The question before the courts was complicated, involving also charges of piracy, claims of salvage, international treaty, and diplomatic relations.

Meanwhile much sympathy for the captives had been roused in New Haven. Simeon Jocelyn took them out on the Green for exercise and their good-natured antics attracted attention to their situation. Some money for their benefit was raised by charging a small admission fee to see them in the jail, and many men provided money for their defense. When the case came through several courts to final trial in Washington, lawyers for the defense included ex-President Adams and Roger S. Baldwin of the North Church. But so strong was the desire in Washington not to offend pro-slavery interests, that Jocelyn and Tappan feared the outcome and planned to spirit the negroes away if the case went against them or there was any attempt to kidnap them. For that purpose they provided a boat which for a number of days cruised about the Sound and often approached the harbor of New Haven.

When the case for the captives was won and they were free, the same men arranged for their return to Africa. They had been given instruction by students in the Divinity School, and asked to have missionaries sent back with them. This was done and the result was the establishment of the Mendi Mission. John W. Barber published a pamphlet in 1840 containing pictures of the captives and giving brief biographies of the thirty-six who still lived. Nathaniel Jocelyn painted a portrait of the leader, Cinque, which is in the rooms of the New Haven Colony Historical Society. The case still rouses interest, and a novel was recently written about it, setting the scene in New Haven and in the mission in Africa.

The slavery question was stirring the people of New Haven in many ways, though there was no agreement as to what should be done. The minister of the North Church, Mr. Dutton, was an abolitionist as was his father, the Rev. Aaron Dutton of Guilford. His house on College Street was a station on the Underground Railway, and in spite of the disapproval of prominent members of his church he preached and worked for the cause of the slave.

In the fifties the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill presented an opportunity for action through the formation of one of the bands of emigrants to Kansas. These bands went out to settle that territory with men who were opposed to slavery and who would bring it into the Union as a free state. The one from this region was one of the largest, sixty of its members coming from New Haven and some of them from the North Church. Among the latter were a deacon, Harvey S. Hall (who returned soon), and the leader, Charles B. Lines. In connection with their departure many meetings were held. One, the most famous political meeting ever held in the North Church, is known to history as the "Kansas Rifle Meeting," though it was called the "Kansas Swindle Meeting" and the church the "Old Fort" by opponents, who objected to this "turning of Christian churches into military rendez-vous and preaching the efficacy of rifles over the Gospel of peace." Reports of this extraordinary meeting spread all over the country, and its influence was felt in overthrowing slavery.

It took place in the church, March 22, 1856, with a charge of twenty-five cents for admission, and was presided over by Henry Ward Beecher. Bibles, with the words, "Be ye steadfast, immovable," stamped on the covers, were presented to members of the band. After addressing the emigrants, Beecher said it had been suggested that as they would probably need means to protect themselves it would be appropriate to add Sharpe's rifles to the Bibles. He offered, if twenty-five were pledged at this meeting, to get as many more from his Brooklyn congregation. Although the rifles cost \$25 each, twenty-seven were quickly promised, Professor Silliman leading the way, and Mr. Dutton following with a rifle for the deacon of his church in addition to his gift of a Bible. Mr. Beecher kept the meeting in lively humor by remarks on the names of the donors. When Henry Killam offered a rifle, he said, "That is the kind that will kill 'em." On John G. North's

making a pledge, he said, "The South will find there is a North." When the Junior class of Yale College pledged a rifle, some one called out, "Is n't there a Senior Class?" Besides the rifles and Bibles a large sum of money was given the emigrants, including that raised by the admission fees. The band led by Mr. Lines settled the town of Wabaunsee, Kansas. The company was often referred to as the "Beecher Rifle Company," and the church founded by them as the "Beecher Rifle Church."

Results were unfortunate for the donor of one rifle, Miss Mary Dutton, sister of the pastor of the church. She was head of Grove Street Female Seminary, a flourishing school for girls in New Haven, which drew pupils from the South, many of them sisters of students at Yale. Patronage from that region was withdrawn. Several jingling verses were made about her and the occasion.

"Shoulder arms Miss Mary Dutton;
Your knapsack buckle tight;
Your Soldier breeches put on
And show them how to fight.

"Quick march upon the foe;
Your Bible in your pocket;
Turn in your heel, turn out your toe,
Present your rifle, cock it.

"Take aim and sight it well,
And now, the trigger, pull it,
And send a slave holder to Hell
With every whistling bullet."

Another, a parody, contained these lines:

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Beecher rifles guard thy rest,
Kansas humbugs without number
Press down gently on thy breast."